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SUBJECT: AFGHAN BORDER AND TRIBAL AFFAIRS: MINISTER IN
SEARCH OF PORTFOLIO

KABUL 00000454 001.2 OF 002

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Acting Minister for Border and Tribal Affairs, Arsala Jamal, says he is attempting to transform a demoralized and weak ministry into one that will play an important and creative role both in developing the poorer border regions and in encouraging reconciliation and reintegration. He describes his primary challenges as lack of human capacity (both in the ministry itself and in the provinces), poor information technology and communications capability between the ministry and its agents, and minimal inter-ministerial coordination and cooperation. He has asked for assistance in developing a professional cadre of civil servants, training and mentoring for one civil servant to improve interagency coordination and communication, an embedded advisor, and funding in support of the new Khushan Khan secondary school campus, established for the benefit of students from the poorer border regions. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Deputy Pol-Mil Counselor, Human Rights Officer and Border Coordinator met with Jamal 2 February to discuss his vision of his portfolio and to clarify the purview of the Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs. Jamal explained that the ministry was originally established 84 years ago to maintain security in the border areas around the Durand Line and to counter attempts by its eastern neighbor to interfere in Afghanistan affairs. Today, responsibility for border security has clearly devolved to other ministries, in particular, the Ministry of Interior and its fairly new Afghanistan Border Police. The Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs is viewed as having been sidelined and is now considered primarily a social affairs ministry. Jamal recognizes the weaknesses of the ministry and the vagueness of its mandate, but appears determined to carve out a niche for himself and the ministry. First, he says he wants his ministry and its provincial agents to serve as liaison between the tribes and the central government, eliciting tribal needs, occasionally advising the tribes on what they should ask for, and trying to meet those needs equitably. Second, he argues that his ministry should be directly involved in the GIROA reconciliation and reintegration effort.

¶3. (SBU) Jamal clarified that while in its early history the ministry was focused almost exclusively on the Durand line, currently it has responsibility for social development in all border areas and among tribes on the northern and southern border. He added that, unfortunately, most of his provincial agents are concentrated on the central and south eastern border, and some provinces remain unstaffed.

Bridge Between the Central Government and the Tribes

¶4. (SBU) Although the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development have responsibility for providing to the citizens of the border areas schools, health services, and infrastructure, Jamal thinks that his ministry and its agents

in the provinces can ensure that the tribal needs in these areas are met and that their requests for improvements in their villages are informed and effective. He complained that Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs provincial agents do not sit on or even participate ad hoc in the provincial development committees. Their participation would not only inform them of the types of projects being considered, but would allow them to convey to the committee what the tribes really need. He also said that he wants to ensure that the Ministry provincial representatives travel and meet more frequently with the tribes.

Reintegration, Reconciliation and Defense: It takes a Village

¶5. (SBU) Jamal seemed eager to insert his ministry into the reintegration and reconciliation process. Young men in the poor border areas, especially the east, are prime candidates for the Taliban. If his ministry can help improve infrastructure and provision of services and increase economic opportunity in the tribal areas, not only will it deter young men from joining the insurgency, but it will also help create a sense of village solidarity against the insurgents. Non-ideological young men currently with the Taliban will begin to see that there is more opportunity in the village than with the Taliban.

¶6. (SBU) While agreeing that schools and clinics and wells are important, he pointed out that each village may have different needs that once met can increase stability and security. He suggested that a village fund⁸ could help in some cases. When asked if there were not a risk that corrupt village leaders would keep the funds for themselves, he dismissed the idea. He admitted that if two tons of flour comes to the village, some leaders may provide a little more for their families) this is considered normal) something that everyone would do; but village scrutiny will ensure that

KABUL 00000454 002.2 OF 002

leaders cannot take it all, and they would be obliged to make sure that everyone in the village is taken care of. In the village, unlike in Kabul, everyone can see what happens, and this transparency limits the scale of diversion of assistance.

Request for Support for the Secondary School for Rural Students

¶7. (SBU) Jamal showed himself very proud of the new facilities being developed for the Khushan Khan school for rural students. The new campus will sit on 18.5 acres in Kabul and will serve both as class rooms and dormitory for students coming from the various border areas. According to Jamal, many of these are students who cannot attend school in their home villages because of security concerns. Currently, only three of some dozens of buildings have been completed. Jamal said that the Ministry of Education is responsible for the establishment of the facility, but his Ministry is responsible for selection and accommodation of the students. He asked whether the U.S. might be able to help in some way support the students or the development of the new facilities. (NOTE: We promised to discuss Khushan Kahn with USAID and get back in touch with him.)

The Need for Inter-ministerial Cooperation

¶8. (SBU) Jamal readily admitted that his ministry is not directly involved with hard security or border management and that he has not seen any coordination with the Ministry of Interior or Ministry of Finance (for customs issues) or even with ministries such as Education or Rural Rehabilitation and Development which would normally be most involved in services and infrastructure for the border areas. He stressed the importance of improved coordination, but said that lack of human capacity was an impediment. He said he hopes that he can create a position within his ministry expressly to coordinate with other ministries that deal with the border

and asked for U.S. mentoring/assistance in setting up the position, specifically and embed adviser.

¶9. (SBU) We noted that the GIROA Office of the National Security Council (ONC) had recently played an important role in coordinating different ministries to deal with the cross-cutting issue of banning ammonium nitrate in Afghanistan. (NOTE: Ammonium nitrate is the primary raw ingredient used in home made explosives for IEDs that have killed thousands of Afghan civilians as well as Coalition Force and Afghan National Army personnel. The successful ban of its use in Afghanistan is a success story for the Afghan Government. See Septel END NOTE)

Biographical Information

¶10. (SBU) Minister Jamal speaks excellent English with a perceptible, but slight accent. Although reports say that he is a Canadian citizen, he admitted only to having paid a short visit to Canada. He visited one brother who lives in Phoenix, Arizona, and referred to another who lives in the UK. He grew up in Paktika province. When he was a youngster, his village had no school and opposed, on the basis of tradition, sending boys much less girls -- to school. Nevertheless, Jamal's father, one of the prosperous men of the village, sent him and his brother to a neighboring village for schooling. Jamal expressed sympathy for women's rights, schooling for young girls, and fighting corruption, but he was doubtful that progress in these areas could be made quickly.

COMMENT

¶11. (SBU) Jamal has some clear ideas of the role he wants to carve for himself and his ministry, but the ministry itself currently plays a negligible role in the border areas. Ministries such as Finance, which holds the customs portfolio as well as the government purse, and Interior, which is responsible for border management up to fifty miles inland from the border, will be preeminent in defining a Comprehensive Border Strategy from the security perspective. Others, such as Commerce and Industry and Rural Rehabilitation and Development, will be important planning and implementing the economic development of the border areas. Jamal seems committed to the idea of inter-ministerial cooperation, however, and, because the Ministry has at least a formal remit to work with on tribal issues throughout the country, we will further explore reintegration issues with him.
Eikenberry